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ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB OF VICTORIA
TOURING DEPARTMENT

MORNINGTON PENINSULA

An abridged history
and
The origin of some place names

MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Mornington Peninsula is a boot-shaped area approximately 30 miles long in a north east-south west direction, and 12 to 15 miles wide in a general east-west direction. It separates Port Phillip Bay from Western Port Bay. Bass Strait abuts the "sole" of the "boot".

There is some doubt as to the identity of the first white man to step ashore on Mornington Peninsula. The young explorer George Bass who travelled in a ship's lifeboat from Sydney, landed at Western Port Bay on December 20 1797. It may fairly be claimed that Bass was the first white man to set foot on Victorian soil but it is reasonably certain that this took place near the eastern entrance to Western Port Bay, possibly near the present site of Rhyll on Phillip Island, and not on Mornington Peninsula. Then there was Lieutenant Murray in command of H.M.S. "Lady Nelson", the first sailing vessel to enter Port Phillip Bay on February 15 1802. Murray landed near the present site of Sorrento and on March 9 1802 raised the Colors of Great Britain and Ireland at Point King and took possession of Port Phillip in the name of King George III. However, before Murray brought his ship through the Heads, Mr. Bowen the Mate of that ship had already entered Port Phillip Bay in a whaleboat. Bowen climbed Arthur's Seat but whether this occurred before, or after, Murray's landing is not clear. It does seem clear, however, that either Bowen or Murray was the first white man to tread the shores of Mornington Peninsula.

Soon after Murray's landing, Matthew Henry Flinders another explorer and navigator of note, on April 20 1802, also landed on the Peninsula and also ascended Arthur's Seat. Apparently the weather at that time was fine and the atmosphere clear as Flinders saw, spread out before him, a wonderful view that extended from the distant Otway Ranges, through the You Yangs on the far side of the Bay; to the Blue Dandenongs and the nearer hills of South Gippsland. That view is there today with the added attraction of farms, orchards, and scattered settlements.

One of the earliest settlers was a Mr. J. E. Sage who, in 1841, having helped to deliver a mob of cattle from Sydney, settled on a property near Mount Eliza which he called "Carrup Carrup". In the meantime, however, some spasmodic attempts had been made to settle in the Cape Schanck area. A Mr. Charles Campbell took up

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land there but soon sold to Mr. Robert Jamieson who in turn soon sold again.

The first settlement at Dromana was on a property called "Kangerong", a name that today is remembered in the Parish of Kangerong, Flinders Shire, and in a Guest House of that name.

Mornington had its beginning at Fossil Beach two miles to the south of its present site. When a pier was built at Schnapper Point to facilitate the shipment of firewood to Melbourne, settlement developed around the pier site. The name Schnapper Point was retained as the name of the headland above the pier but the settlement later was named Mornington. The first school on the Peninsula was built at Schnapper Point.

During the early days of settlement numerous kangaroos and dingoes proved to be a problem. In one drive to clear the area of kangaroos, 800 of these animals were captured in yards built from bush timber. Skirmishes with the native tribesmen were also troublesome at times although the natives in this area were generally peaceful and readily adopted much of the white man's way of life. They would do almost anything in return for a piece of "damper". It is interesting to note that the Peninsula seems never to have carried a large native population despite the availability of ample natural food both on land and in the sea.

Supplies for the early settlers on the Peninsula were delivered by bullock wagons which were often bogged for days in low-lying parts at the northern end of the Peninsula. The route from Frankston to Melbourne, known as the "Fish rack", along the beach to Brighton thence overland proved little better. Mail was delivered by someone on horseback who could find the time to travel to the metropolis to collect the mail.

The first substantial house built on Mornington Peninsula is there still. In 1844, Mr. G. C. McCrae who had taken up Arthur's Seat Run, built for himself and his family a homestead that today is known as The McCrae Homestead. It is located at No.8 Charles Street McCrae which is but a short distance off the Nepean Highway and almost behind the McCrae lighthouse. Timber for the house was felled locally and dragged to the site by bullocks. Hand-made nails were used in the construction of this fine home. 3,000 bricks for the chimneys were brought from Melbourne in the ketch "Jemima".

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Much of the original furniture, drawings, paintings and pictures are still in The McCrae Homestead. With the old wine-glasses and other relics of the past there is one item that seems to be of particular interest in this house that for so many years has overlooked the sea. This is a swinging cabin lamp from the barque "Argyle" that brought the McCrae family from the "old country" in 1841.

The McCrae Homestead is open to visitors :

1st. December until after Easter Daily
10 a.m. to noon; 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

After Easter until 30th November.
Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday 10 a.m. to noon;
Sunday and Public holidays 11 a.m. to noon;
2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Immediately inside the western entrance to Western Port Bay and at the south eastern extremity of Mornington Peninsula is the town of Flinders. This part of the peninsula was first sighted by Lieutenant Grant in H. M. S. "Lady Nelson" in the year 1801. Flinders, which still retains much of its rustic beauty, and its peace and quietness of earlier years, has an historic association with early communications.

In 1883 a submarine telegraph cable was laid from Flinders to Low Head in Tasmania. Neither this cable nor one that had been laid in 1867 from the Victorian coast near Cape Otway, via King Island, to Stanley in Tasmania proved satisfactory.

With Federation and a need for vastly improved interstate Communications, two new cables were laid between Flinders and Low Head in 1909. These were known as the "East" Cable, 190.460 nautical miles long, and the "West", 189.083 nautical miles long. At Flinders the cables dropped into the sea from a cable hut on the beach a few yards to the south of the present pier.

With the introduction of a submarine telephone cable across Bass Strait from Apollo Bay to Stanley in 1935, the old "East" and "West" cables were put on stand-by. In 1942 those portions of these cables that could be recovered were lifted from the ocean bed and, as a war measure, relaid across Torres Strait from Cape York to Delena, Papua. They were abandoned in 1944.

This abridged history of Mornington Peninsula would not be complete without mention of its two "half-time" schools that belonged to a period that has now passed into Education Department history.

These two schools served by one teacher, were located one at Main Ridge behind Red Hill, and the other about half a mile on the Rosebud side of the junction of Cape Schanck and Boneo Roads. This latter school was locally known as "Black's Camp" but officially it was Cape Schanck State School No. 2168. The lone teacher, travelling on horseback, alternated each day between the two schools thus providing a teaching service at a particular school on Monday, Wednesday, Friday of one week, and Tuesday and Thursday of the following week. Alternate days, were, of course, spent at the other school. Attendance at the Cape Schanck school was seldom more than 8 pupils and sometimes 3 or 4. Most of the pupils walked three miles each way between the lighthouse and the school. This school was opened in July 1879 and finally closed in 1921. Some indication of the size of the building might be gained from the fact that, when it was sold for removal, it realised only £82.

ORIGINS OF SOME PLACE-NAMES

Arthur's Seat (1031 Ft.)

Mr. Bowen, Mate of the "Lady Nelson", in 1802, wrote in his log: "There is a high mountain which I have named "Arthur's Seat" from its resemblance to a mountain of that name a few miles from Edinburgh, Scotland."

Balcombe

From the Balcombe family who owned a property, "The Briars" in the area during early settlement.

Brighton

Originally "Watervale", it was re-named Brighton in 1841 after Brighton in England.

Bass Strait

From George Bass of the Bass and Flinders team who sailed around Tasmania and proved it to be an island.

Cape Schanck

From Captain John Schanck at the British Admiralty who invented a retractable keel fitted to Lt. Grant's "Lady Nelson" which enabled the vessel to sail into shallow waters during her employment on exploration work ("Lady Nelson", later under command of Lt. Murray, was the first sailing vessel to enter Port Phillip Bay.)

Crib Point

During the early days of exploration a small hut was built there. The hut was used by explorers and others in which to have lunch, or "crib", hence Crib Point.

Flinders

From Matthew Flinders (See Bass Strait above).

Frankston

From Charles Franks who, in 1854, was killed by aborigines and buried on Flagstaff Hill, the first Port Phillip burial place after 1838.

Gippsland

Originally known as "Gipps' Land" and named by Count Paul Strzelecki in 1840 after Governor Gipps of Port Jackson.

McCrae

From the McCrae family who settled on the southern side of Arthur's Seat in 1844, on Arthur's Seat Run.

Merricks

Probably from Maurice Meyrick who fought a duel nearby with a Mr. E. Baker.

Moorabbin

Believed to have come from the Moorabbin native tribe that visited the Peninsula from time to time.

Mordialloc

From the aboriginal "Moody Yallock" meaning "Near a tidal stream".

Mornington

From one authority: Originally Schnapper Point, later re-named after Lord Mornington who became the Marquis of Wellesly, Governor of India. From another authority: Named after Mornington, Ireland.

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Mount Eliza

From Eliza, wife of Captain Hobson of H.M.S. "Rattlesnake".

Mount Martha

From Martha, wife of Captain Lonsdale, Superintendent of Port Phillip.

Point Nepean

From Sir Ewen Nepean, an early Secretary to the British Admiralty.

Rosebud

From the ketch "Rosebud" wrecked there 1851.

Schnapper Point

From the type of fish that abounded there. (See also Mornington).

Shoreham

Named by the first school master in the area, after his native English Shoreham.

Sorrento

From the seaport village of that name on Dublin Bay Ireland. It was thus named by the Commissioner of Lands (Sir Charles Gavan Duffy) in the late 1850's.

SHORT SUMMARY OF DATES

1801 Lt. Grant in "Lady Nelson" passed through Bass Strait naming Cape Otway and Cape Schanck but did not realize that Port Phillip Bay existed.

Early February 1802

The first white man set foot on Mornington Peninsula.

March 9 1802

Port Phillip taken possession in the name of King George III.

October 10 1803

First death recorded. John Skilhorn.

November 25 1803

First birth recorded. William James Hobart Thorne.

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November 28 1803

First marriage recorded. Richard Garrett and Hanna Harvey.

1858 Cape Schanck lighthouse established.

1868 First Post Office opened Mornington. The building, used as a store, still exists.

1874 McCrae (officially known as Eastern) lighthouse established.

July 1879

Cape Schanck State School No. 2168 opened. (finally closed 1921).

1883 First "private" Flinders - Low Head (Tasmania) submarine telegraph Cable laid (unsatisfactory).

1909 First "official" Flinders - Low Head submarine telegraph Cable laid. (Recovered in parts 1942).

SHORT MUNICIPAL HISTORY

Cranbourne, created a District June 19 1860, proclaimed a Shire March 6 1868 (later redefined).

Frankston, created a District November 6 1860, proclaimed a Shire November 24 1871.

Flinders, created a District December 1 1868, proclaimed a Shire December 24 1874 (named changed from Flinders and Kangerong to Flinders January 28 1914).

Mornington, constituted a Shire May 31 1893 (name changed from New Mornington to Mornington January 19 1894).

Hastings, constituted a Shire October 18 1961.
